

## Assessment and Data Based Decisions

### Assessment and Data Based Decisions from Birth-5

The ADE Early Childhood Education Unit has adapted the National Association for the Education of Young Children's definition of on-going progress assessment.

*Assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information. (McAfee, O., Leong, D.J., & Bodrova, 2004, p.3*

Effective child assessment is not based on a single measure or incident. In more formalized Early Childhood Education Programs, a Comprehensive Assessment System for Young Children Birth to Five is being implemented in Arizona. Assessing Student's early literacy development is key to ensuring increased school readiness and alignment with Kindergarten.

In educational programs throughout the state, assessment is used to monitor a child's development and learning, guide planning and decision making, identify children who might benefit from special services or additional assistance, and report to and communicate with others.

In Arizona, the Early Childhood ongoing progress assessment system is used to give the adult information about each child or a group of children. Through the assessment, the teacher will know the strengths and needs of each child in the classroom and/or group and will be able to utilize the information to **guide their instruction** and **decision making process**. Children benefit from use of assessment because adults use what they learn from assessment to adapt instruction, experiences, and activities.

The Arizona Board of Education approved a single assessment instrument (Teaching Strategies Gold) to assess students Birth through Kindergarten who participate in more formalized preschool experiences. It is the intention of Arizona to use this single assessment to unify the field of early childhood in a single common assessment that can be used in a variety of settings. The early childhood assessment system is designed for all Arizona's children **including English language learners, children with special needs**, and children from **diverse cultural backgrounds**.

Families, care givers, and teachers are collecting information about children every day through a variety of methods. A variety of assessments may be used throughout the life of a child for varied purposes. As part of the Early Childhood Assessment System, family, caregiver and teacher observations and anecdotal notes are a seminal piece of formalizing and documenting the data about a student. Arizona's Early Childhood Assessment System supports the use of portfolios to house examples of a child's work to document skills and knowledge over time. Formative assessment data will be collected during instruction time and summative assessment data will be collected periodically throughout the year. Both levels of data will be analyzed and used as a matter of best practice. Data will be collected and analyzed on a more frequent basis during the implementation of interventions to monitor progress and inform instruction. As part of a quality assessment system, the Arizona Literacy plan recognizes the importance of parent observation and input as a critical piece of assessment and data collection.

## Assessment & Data-based Decisions K-12

### To inform instruction and monitor student learning and progress

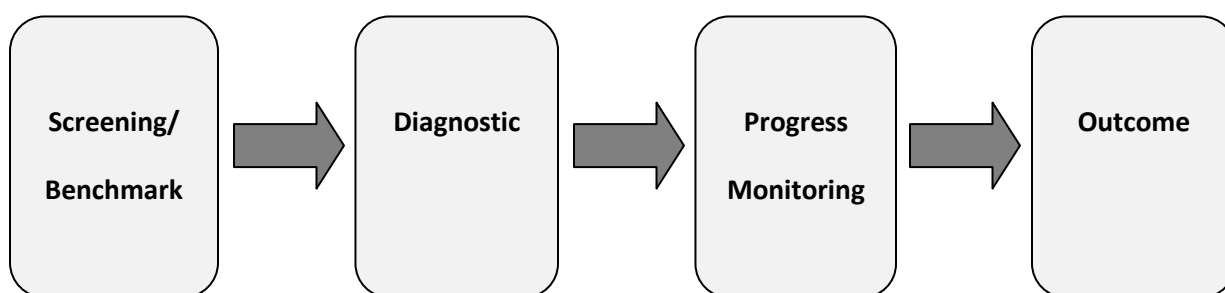
Scientific-based research studies in education continue to acknowledge the value of frequently assessing students' reading progress to prevent the downward spiral of reading failure. The probability of remaining a poor reader at the end of fourth grade, given a child was a poor reader at the end of first grade, is 88% (Juel, 1988). Therefore, valid and reliable assessment data is the key to providing early identification for intervention and to plan for meeting the needs of all students identified at various levels of performance.

Assessment serves many purposes and a variety of assessments help to continually inform and improve instruction for all students. Assessment provides the necessary information to make decisions regarding effectiveness of instruction as well as allocation of resources to support student learning. Assessment can take many forms; including a survey of *all* students to determine who is at risk; or a diagnostic assessment to determine specific individual needs of a particular student.

Assessment is one of the necessary pillars of a school responsive to student learning. It is an ongoing process where information is gathered, analyzed and reflected upon, which contributes to important decision making. Assessments shall be aligned to State Standards for performance or learning.

Each district must establish a system of assessment and monitoring, utilizing valid and reliable assessments. Data gathered from multiple sources will identify at-risk students, including English language learners and Special Education students as early as possible.

The assessment system must be made up of the following four types of assessment, as defined by the AZ State Board of Education:



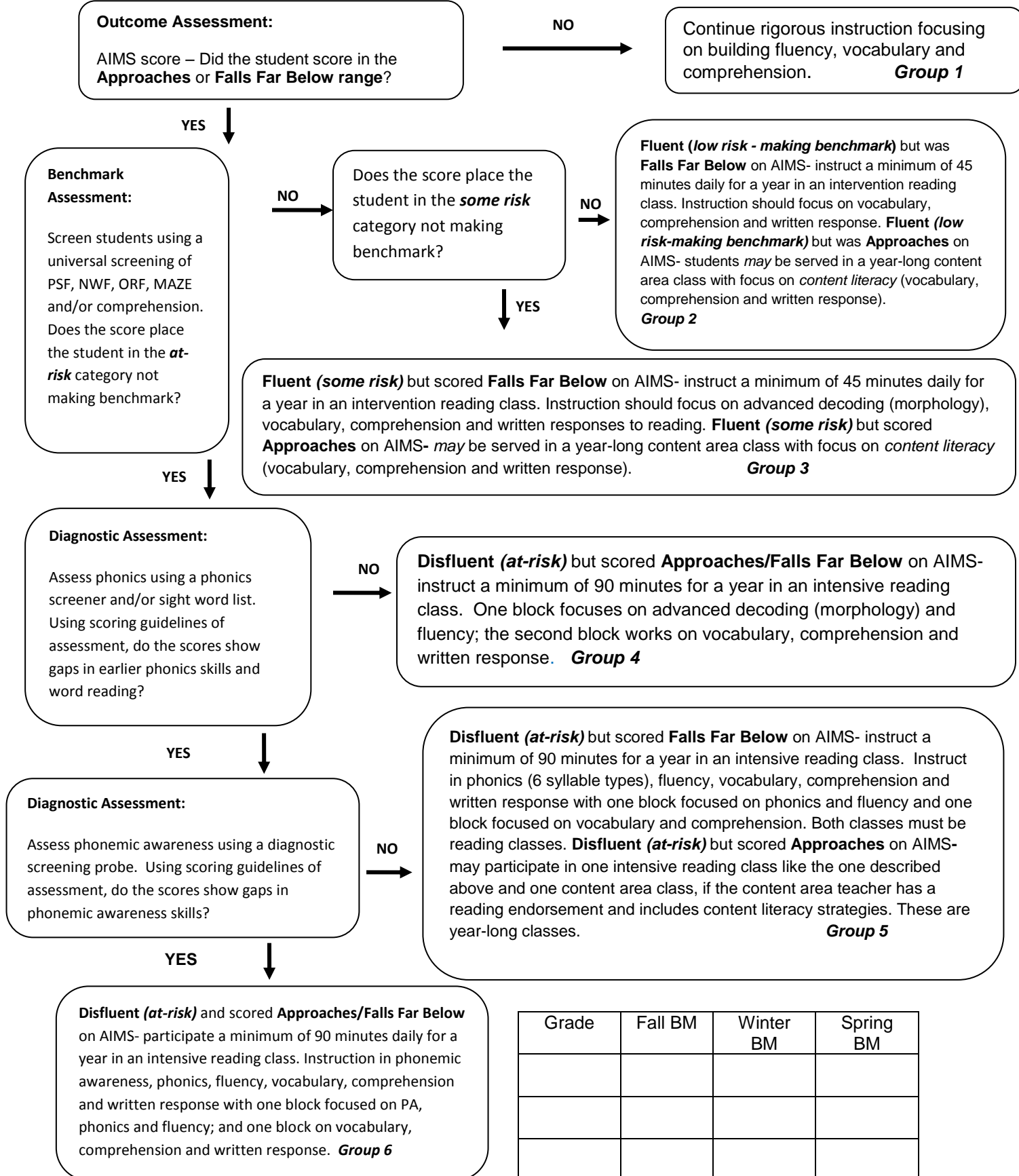
- A. Screening/Benchmark assessment: Brief assessments that focus on critical reading skills strongly predictive of future reading growth and development must be conducted with all children at the beginning of the school year or upon entry. This is necessary to identify children likely to need extra or alternative forms of instruction. These assessments are conducted at the student's designated grade level. At the elementary level, students should be screened at least three times a year. At the secondary level, screening may refer to a review of existing student

data, such as performance on state assessments; oral reading fluency probes; maze or other brief assessments designed to indicate overall literacy level. As the name implies, screening is to sift students to accurately identify those students who are at risk for being unsuccessful.

- B. Diagnostic assessment: An assessment that is given to help pinpoint instructional needs. They are conducted at any time during the school year when in-depth analysis of students' reading skills, strengths and weaknesses is needed and is indicated by student performance. Diagnostic information is gained through formal or informal measures for the purpose of determining specific deficiencies, and for the planning of specific targeted instruction. Examples of diagnostic assessments would include: phonological awareness screeners, phonics screeners, a spelling inventory, or an assessment of oral reading fluency (when error analysis is performed).
- C. Progress monitoring assessment: A type of formative assessment conducted on an ongoing basis (i.e. weekly, monthly or quarterly) to: (a) estimate rates of reading improvement (b) identify children who are not demonstrating adequate progress and therefore require additional or different instructional practices, and/or (c) compare the efficacy of different instructional practices to design more effective, individualized instruction for at-risk learners. One important aspect of these assessments is that they are conducted at the student's "skill level" and not at their grade level. Progress Monitoring Assessments are *for* learning and have a significant and direct connection to classroom instruction. "Improvement in their use has significant potential to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning in adolescent literacy." (Black & William, 1998). Students who have been identified as at-risk and who are receiving additional support through an intervention should be progress monitored and the data frequently reviewed to be sure the student is making adequate progress. It is recommended that students receiving an additional intervention (Tier II) be monitored every two to three weeks. Students who receive an intensive intervention (Tier III) should be monitored every week.
- D. Outcome assessment: This is another name for summative, "high-stakes" or end-of-year accountability tests. These assessments usually measure reading achievement with silent passage reading and multiple choice vocabulary and comprehension questions. Outcome assessments yield information at the individual, classroom, grade, school and district levels. Examples of outcome assessments are: Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA), Galileo, NWEA, ASVAB and SAT-10.

Assessment involves feedback to students at the elementary, middle and high school levels because as learners they can take charge of their own knowledge and skill acquisition, set learning goals and monitor their own learning. At all levels students are involved in their own reflection of learning as they monitor their progress and set learning goals through viewing, evaluating and discussing individual assessment data.

## Who Needs Support? Flow chart



Grade	Fall BM	Winter BM	Spring BM

## **Data based Decisions**

Instructional/intervention teams consisting of teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals and administrators, will use timely data from all of these types of assessments to plan and implement differentiated instruction to improve student learning.

A collaborative discussion among all educators is a critical element in an effective school. It is essential that the building leader provides time and space for the teams to meet and have discussions about the assessment process; student, class and school wide data, and about individual students progress or lack of progress. The collaboration across educators, specialists, and administrators provides the kind of support and teamwork that creates a positive and meaningful working climate. In establishing the collaborative teams (grade level or content specific teams), schools need to plan, organize and develop procedural guidelines, continue to evaluate effectiveness, and make adjustments as needed. Effective teams use a problem-solving process to discuss and plan for grade level, classroom and an individual student's progress.

The collaborative teams will use data to make a variety of instructional decisions about: School materials, instructional techniques, professional development needs, school effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, an individual student's baseline academic achievement and student progress toward becoming successful users of text. As accountability increases, school teams and administrators will be increasingly called upon to use student data to make decisions about personnel. As schools use data for making decisions, it is recommended that they use the following problem solving model:

### **Define the “problem” and analyze why it occurs**

What is the difference between current performance and expectation for minimum proficiency? Collect and analyze data about instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner. Use student records, interviews, observations, and data to assess and analyze the problem.

### **Develop an action plan**

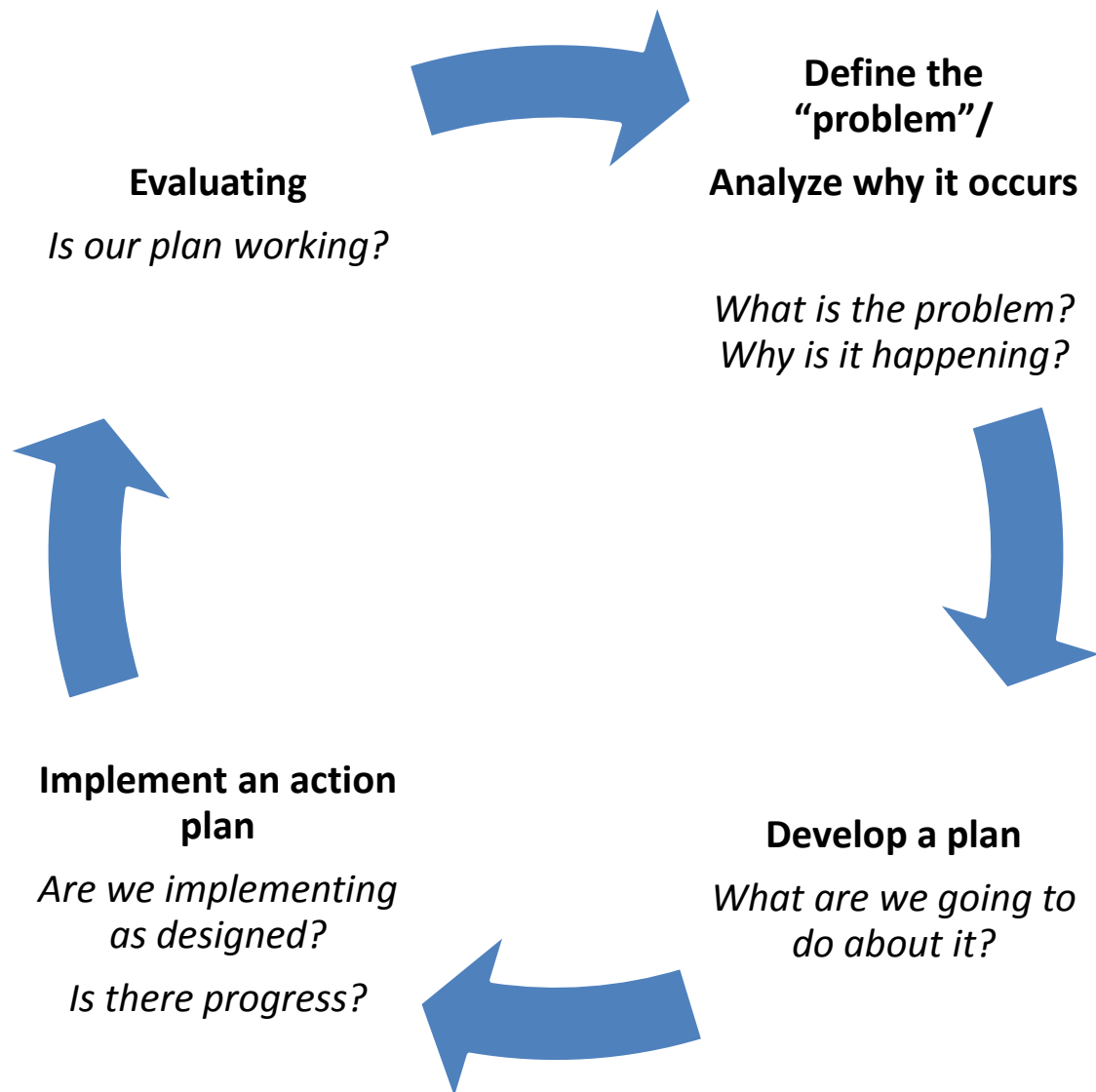
Link assessment to instruction: target the skill(s) in need of intervention. Set appropriate and ambitious learning goals. The action plan includes what type of instruction, the duration and intensity, the instructor(s), which progress monitoring instruments are used and how often progress monitoring should occur. The action plan includes keeping parents informed and involved.

### **Implement and monitor student progress and intervention fidelity**

Monitor the fidelity of the instruction. Coordinate systematic and frequent student progress monitoring and data collection. Accumulate data, graph, and report to the team, student, and parents.

### Evaluate effectiveness

Was instruction implemented with fidelity? If so, what does the accumulated progress monitoring data indicate about learning rate and grade-level expectation? Consider each one of the alterable variables (amount of time/practice of instruction, program efficacy, professional development or size of group). Please see the Alterable Variable Chart in the appendices.



It is critical that schools and districts have a Data Storage System in place in order to easily store and report individual, class, grade level, school and district assessment data. To assist schools and districts, the Arizona Department of Education provides a data base for storage and reporting of school and student data. (<http://www.azrti.com/>)

